

Remarks of Alex Pelissari
Teacher
Public Schools
For the Education Committee
On S.B. No. 24, AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS
Section 29, *Teacher Tenure*

February 21, 2012

My name is Alex Pelissari, and I'm a teacher in Connecticut.

I am writing this letter in protest of the appalling direction education reform is taking in the State of Connecticut. I am a teacher in a large suburban middle school, and have been in my position for the last 15 years. In contrast to the Governor's opinion, I did not stop working after gaining tenure. In fact, my job demands have increased because of the additional administrative demands required by legislation. I utilize my experience, knowledge and skill everyday in the classroom to make a difference.

The current paradigm of reducing education and especially the children to a few statistics is shameful. Public education is about the whole child, and it is a process that lasts many years.

The Governor and Department of Education are under the delusion that the achievement differences between districts in the state are solely based on the quality of classroom instruction, and that the way to correct the difference is to relentlessly disparage the thousands of educators who have spent the better parts of their lives serving the parents and students of Connecticut. The constant negative comments in the media and from the state have created an extremely hostile work environment.

Let's suppose for a moment that the Department of Education and all the reform experts that the state is constantly hiring are correct. Better teachers equal higher student achievement regardless of any other factors in a child's life. The state could save millions of dollars by having the teachers who work in high achieving districts come to the poor performing districts and tell those teachers how to teach. I challenge you to pair a poor performing school with a high performing school, and have the staff switch for a year. See what happens. My educated guess is that the school would not realize any greater success because the underlying issues impacting student achievement have not been addressed.

The current batch of reforms is shortsighted and harmful. They are being implemented because the state has no control over the very real causes of poor achievement, (poverty, crime, parental neglect, drug addiction, violence, child hunger, and transience to name a few). Teachers are the only variable in the education equation that the state can control, and so it is exerting its full power to demean, degrade, and humiliate the very people who actually have some small impact on a child's life. Everyone remembers their favorite teacher. No one remembers a pointless education reform.

I am also the parent of two children. One is currently a junior in a very prestigious engineering college, and the other is a sophomore in high school. Both attended public education in our town. My wife and I are very satisfied with the education and resources provided. We believe one gets out of education what one puts into it. If one of my children did not succeed as well as I had hoped, I did not blame classroom instruction but instead questioned my child. Did the child maximize the opportunities in class and at home, or was their effort lacking? We provided support and encouragement to our children and stressed the importance of education. It is very difficult to educate a disinterested and unmotivated student. Interest and motivation to succeed in school comes from the home.

The state has challenged the teachers of Connecticut to improve student achievement, and teachers have valiantly accepted. I see myself and my colleagues trying everyday to improve our holistic approach to education by implementing new best practice classroom techniques, utilizing guidance counselors and other social support services, and speaking with parents or guardians. I now challenge anyone in the Governor's Office, the State Department of Education, or The General Assembly to come to my classroom and learn more about the factors outside the control of the teacher that impacts educational success, and to develop realistic appropriate strategies to address how we can work together to achieve higher student achievement.